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EAST GERMAN RESISTANCE TO THE COMMUNIST REGIME AND TO SOVIETIZATION

L'Economie
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[Comment: Following is a summary of an article published by the French periodical, L'Economie, which discusses the reasons for the alleged "failure of the Communist regime to Sovietize the GDR." The article deals with the economic, cultural, and religious factors involved in the East German resistance to Sovietization.]

General

From 1945 to 1947, East Germany was treated by the Russians as the vanquished enemy. From 1947 to 1951, with the economic revival of West Germany, the Russians attempted to conciliate opinion in both East and West Germany by championing the cause of German unity. In July 1952, Soviet policy toward Germany took a third turn. With West German rearmament becoming imminent, the Russians, while continuing to exploit the propaganda theme of German unity, reached the conclusion that an agreement with the West regarding unification had become impossible. They decided to treat the GDR as if it were never to be united with West Germany. Their objective became the acceleration of the economic collectivization of the GDR and its rapid conversion into a Communist state.

However, the policy of the Russians in the first years of their occupation of East Germany had been contrary to the Communist doctrine that industrialization is the key to a socialist economy. The East German production capacity had been reduced by nearly half. Hence, retooling would be necessary, with priority on heavy industry at the expense of consumer goods and agricultural production. This resulted in a lower standard of living and increased workers' norms.

It was the increase in norms which prompted the Berlin riots in June 1953. Labor unrest has not ceased since that time, and the over-all character of certain movements seems to indicate the existence among the workers of an organized opposition sponsored, perhaps, by the Social Democrat trade unions, clandestinely reconstituted. While there were a few strikes in July and August 1953, today the discontent has taken the form more of general hostility.

Peasant Resistance

The first phase of the Russian agricultural socialization of the GDR, the division of lands which had been the property of the Junkers, was apparently popular enough; and the second phase, the formation of cooperatives, did not raise any major difficulties. From 1945 to 1951, in the field of agriculture, Soviet policy met no very serious obstacles.

However, this situation changed in 1952, when the third phase, the transformation of the peasants into kolkhoz farmers, was undertaken. Resistance suddenly became very vigorous: thousands of farmers escaped to West Germany and most of those remaining, two thirds of the population of the GDR, took up passive resistance, slaughtered their livestock, and deliberately reduced their plantings. The decline in agricultural production, which had been considerable in 1952, was disastrous in 1953. The harvests of wheat, beets, and

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potatoes were so poor in 1953 that the USSR and its Satellites had to send great quantities of food products into the GDR. At present, the Communist authorities are unable to honor the meager rations of meat, sugar, milk, and fats; and the food situation is so serious that famine can be expected this winter.

The Russian occupation regime was at the beginning extremely rigorous. It was the time of the "collective guilt" of the German people, held responsible for the Nazi horrors. Germany was also treated as the vanquished enemy from the economic standpoint. Industry was halted, the best of the agricultural production went to the USSR, and the majority of the male population was in captivity in the Soviet Union.

The terror of the last days of the war and the occupation regime has left memories which have never been erased. It must be remembered that the military occupation is continuing and that, in the June 1953 riots in East Berlin, it was Russian tanks and troops that established order. Resentment has been very lasting in the German memory and, furthermore, German pride has suffered its greatest humiliation.

German Contempt for Slavic Peoples

German scorn of Slavic peoples was increased after the war by the errors committed by the USSR. During the first 2 years, the Soviets made no distinction between Nazis and Germans. The annexation by the USSR of Koenigsberg and a part of East Prussia in order to "punish Prussia for having been the cradle of German militarism" had the appearance of a deliberate act of humiliation. The brutal expulsion of millions of Germans from the Saxon and Silesian territories beyond the Oder-Neisse line which, according to the terms of the Potsdam agreements, were merely placed under Polish administration by the USSR, but were in fact annexed by Poland, served only to aggravate anti-Russian sentiment. In 1950, the government of the GDR recognized the Oder-Neisse line as the frontier between Germany and Poland. The Germans have never forgiven the Communist regime for this amputation of their national territory.

Conflict With the Lutheran Church

While abstaining from open battle against the Lutheran Church, the Communist authorities have attempted since 1945 to counterbalance its influence by spreading Marxist doctrine and by obstructing religious education. But the people remained very much attached to their beliefs and it is generally agreed that the Soviet occupation was marked by a new outbreak of religious sentiment. A secret poll conducted at the beginning of 1953 in an East German plant revealed that 79 percent of the workers interrogated regularly attended religious services, compared with only 64 percent before 1945. The resurgence of religious feeling in the GDR is related to the national protest against a foreign regime, a regime which is moreover materialistic and atheistic.

The Communist authorities concentrated their greatest efforts on the youth, with attempts at Marxist indoctrination and outlawing of Christian youth movements. Being unable to organize into official groups, the Protestant youth formed extremely solid and active communities around their pastors. These communities benefited from the experience acquired under the Hitler regime by the clandestine movement led by Niemöller. The Communist organizations soon took offense at the Young Evangelical Communities, particularly numerous among school children. In February 1953, the communities were outlawed and their members expelled from the universities and schools.

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Relations between the Lutheran Church and the GDR government be-
strained. Many pastors were arrested. A movement hostile to the regime be-
came so general and so active in the GDR that the authorities, in June 1953,
had to rescind their restrictions, release the arrested pastors, and once
again permit the Young Protestant Communities to function.

Further attempts at religious persecution will undoubtedly follow. It
is probable that they will only further strengthen the resolution of the East
German Protestants. On the moral level, there is no trace in the German con-
science of that sort of inferiority complex which can be noted among certain
Catholics regarding Communism, for example in France. To the East Germans,
Marxism can appear only as intellectual and moral regression.

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